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SERMON CCCXCII.

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MISTAKES IN EDUCATION.

"When I call to remembrance the enfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice, and I am persuaded that in thee also." 2 Tim. i. 5.

THE Apostle here expresses confidence in the personal faith or holiness of Timothy; and by affirming that two of his nearest relations had been also sincere believers, intimates that there was a connexion between his faith and theirs; or that theirs was in some way causative or instrumental of his:—an intimation which accords with experience. What of true religion has existed among men, has, with little exception, been found among the descendants of the faithful. And this is only what might be reasonably expected from the nature of holiness, and of the parental relation, and from the ordinances, declarations and promises of God.

The connexion, however, between parental and filial religion, is very far from being invariable. Some religious parents have unbelieving and profligate children; others have large families, with scarcely one religious child; and an extended family circle, with no irreligious member is uncommon. That religion has increased among men, shows that family religion has been advancing; but had the children of pious parents been invariably pious, the Church long since would have had possession of the world.

Why is it that the connexion in this case is broken; that the unfeigned faith which dwells in parents, has too often no lodgment in the hearts of their offspring?

It is very true, and may be very appropriately said, at this place, that piety does not descend like depravity from parents to children, by a principle of nature, or a divine constitution, or any fixed law, positive or natural. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, whether

the progenitors be spiritual persons or not. It is written of the saints, the sons of God, that they were by nature, the children of wrath, even as others; and that their difference from others, is referrible to a birth, which was not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. In confirmation of which all the instances of irreligious offspring from holy ancestors, may be justly adduced.—It is, therefore, not the mere consideration of piety in parents, that should lead us to look for piety in their children. Parents generally transmit, in some measure, their physical peculiarities, and so lay a foundation in their children, for natural excellence or degeneracy, for refined and elevated, or for comparatively low constitutional propensities. But holiness is always the immediate product of the renewing and sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit. The only child ever born into this world, who did not need to be born again, was the Holy Child Jesus, and the fact that no moral pollution was contracted in his unparalleled generation, is thus explained by the angel to his virgin mother. The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God.

This important fact, however, does not suffice as an answer to our question, unless it be true,—Either that renewing grace is withheld in some instances by the arbitrary will of God; or that in some instances this grace is inadequate; or that in some instances parents cannot, or finally, that they do not, through voluntary negligence avail themselves of its proffered aid.

The first is not true. No design, arrangement, agency, or decree of God, can be assigned as responsible for the fact, that pious parents have unholy children. God has declared himself averse to it, has made provisions against it, and has appointed means for its prevention. And it cannot be, that he has a secret purpose, adverse to the efficiency of his own appointments. This sufficiently shows that it cannot be accounted for simply by resolving it into the will of God.

The second is not true; namely, that the Divine provisions against native depravity, are sometimes in themselves, inadequate. It is manifest, that all children are not alike in respect to the disadvantages of the original guilt. Some from the beginning have unhappy physical peculiarities. Some seem naturally inclined, others disinclined to piety. But it surely cannot be that God gives us children, of such constitutional qualities, that even in defiance of his grace, they must perish. However favorable to piety may be early indications in some children, they will not become true saints without the grace of God: and however unfavorable may be these indications in other children, Divine grace surely

can sanctify them. Parental piety should neither presume in the one case, nor despair in the other. In both cases the course of wisdom and of duty is the utmost diligence in waiting on God for his blessing.

The third, we must think, is not true; that is, that though God's grace be adequate, there are cases in which parents, to whom the advantages of this grace are offered, cannot, in any way, avail themselves thereof in behalf of their children. We must reject this supposition, because it impeaches God of tantalism in his overtures of grace. For such tantalism there palpably is, if there be in fact the alleged impracticability.

It remains, therefore, that the evil be referred to parental delinquency. We are reduced to this conclusion, apparently by the force of irresistible demonstration. We see not how it can be evaded. Parental delinquency breaks the connexion between parental and filial piety, or solves the melancholy and painful fact, that holy parents have unbelieving and irreligious children.

The importance of this conclusion, however, in its practical relations, depends on what is meant by parental delinquency. It will deprive it of all power, to understand by it a mere coming short of perfection in the business of education. Since, if perfection were the condition of the Divine favor, all men would feel compliance impracticable, and would thus be hindered by despair from seriously attempting it. If this were what is meant, to make out, that the irreligion of children is owing to delinquency on the part of parents, were to do what in practical application would amount to nothing.

But perfection, under the economy of grace, is not the condition of the promises—a condition which never was, never will be, and metaphysical precision apart, never can be fulfilled; and nothing were more reproachful to the Divine mercy than to conceive of it as refusing its blessing to all endeavors on our part, which are in any respect or degree defective. The delinquency in question, therefore, must be one not from simple perfection, but from a practicable faithfulness—a faithfulness to which parents by the grace of God can attain. The truth then, before us, in demonstrative evidence, is, that the children of the pious become in too many instances irreligious and die in unbelief, not from the arbitrary will of God, nor from inadequacy in his provisions against such a consequence, nor from incompetency in parents to avail themselves of these gracious provisions, but from avoidable and criminal default on the part of parents; these epithets being applied in no technical sense, but as they are freely used in common conversation.

This is a proposition, confirmed by all we can know of God, from both reason and revelation; and also by the Divine economy in

ward mankind. It is a recorded fact, that before God would suffer the human race to commence its generations under the power of the Fall, he introduced his remedial system; and it is impossible for us to doubt, that if mankind had availed themselves of the advantages of that system, as they might, and ought to have done, the disastrous influence of the apostasy would have been counteracted and the race recovered. A different belief from this is inconsistent with all just conceptions of the Deity, as a being of pure benevolence.

We will now proceed with our main design in this discussion, namely, to remark in some particulars on such mistakes or defaults in educating children, as we have already generally characterised as avoidable and inexcusable. We enter on a wide field, but we shall limit our views to such things as we deem of the highest concern, and most to our edification, and these we shall reduce to a few distinct heads.

I. Doubtless one of the chief causes of inefficiency in conducting this great business, is, mistake, or at least indefiniteness of conception, as to its just *purpose*, or *object*. That object, ultimately, is to prepare our children for the sublime end of their creation—to glorify God, and enjoy him forever in heaven. But as the way to heaven lies through the earth—as man's eternity takes its stamp from the manner in which he fulfils his part on the present stage of existence—the object to be directly pursued is preparation for action here—*aptitude and furniture* for meeting the calls, exigencies, and conflicts of this life.

Is it not to be feared that this idea of the design of Christian education has been too often absent, or at least so vaguely and feebly received, as to have little practical influence? The future existence of children which, generally, alas, is disregarded in their education, seems, in some instances, to have so filled the minds of parents in their religious care for them, that their present existence could hardly have place as a legitimate object of that kind of care. The two states of beings have been rather regarded as antagonistic to each other, than as what they truly are in effect, one and the same state. Education of course, so far as religion has to do with it, has, exclusively, respected in some sort, eternity, not time; nay, it has been so managed as to give disqualification for all just intercourse with time and its affairs. The natural consequence is, that the children either become visionary recluses, or what is much more common, the victims of worldly temptation and corruption.

Not only should the education be conducted with this life in thought, definitely and distinctly, but discrimination should be made between the different parts of life; and that particular part

should be kept most in mind, in which the active energy of man should be chiefly exerted; namely, *the business of his calling*. Here it is, that the Christian character is required to develop itself; here, that Christ is to be served, and God glorified on the earth. It is not in contemplation but in action, that man meets the trial of his spirit, and works out his destiny. It is not by his prayers, but by his fruits, that his character is known, and God honored before men. And the greater portion of each one's active life-time should be, as with the Christian it surely is, spent in the discharge of his business. It is indeed but a fraction of time comparatively, that should be ordinarily given to anything else. A part of it should be for recreation, and a part for devotion, but the mass should be for business. This of course is the important part of human life, to which educational discipline should have paramount respect. But is this the common impression of the end to be mainly pursued in Christian education, namely, qualification for the conduct of business? We are almost afraid that the doctrine inculcating it will be regarded as a paradox. If there be danger of this, is it any longer surprising that there should have been so little success in the religious training of children? If in the processes of education there has been a misapprehension; nay, if there has not been a *clear and strong* conception of its chief object, there could have been no *effectual* reference to it. How then could its attainment, as they result, have been expected? Why should we look to see the rising generation coming forth to devote *the labors* of their life to God? If they get through the world creditably and comfortably, doing their business as others do theirs, and observing set times and duties of devotion, is not this the just amount of what could have been reasonably anticipated from their religious training? That they should live among men, in all things, as the servants of Christ, going out and coming in, buying and selling, receiving and spending, eating and drinking, *to the glory of God,** why should we hope to see such a consequence, from a discipline in which the *aim to produce* it is wanting?

* For an illustration of the idea here, which from the familiarity of the language, seems to have in many minds a very indefinite impression, let the reader take the following extract from the record of an example in the works of President Edwards: "Oh, how good, said the person once, is it to work for God in the day time, and at night to lie down under his smiles! High experiences and religious affections in this person have not been attended with any disposition at all to neglect the necessary business of a secular calling, to spend the time in reading and prayer, and other exercises of devotion; but worldly business has been attended with great alacrity as part of the service of God; the person declaring that it being done thus it was found to be as good as prayer. These things have been accompanied with exceeding concern and zeal for moral duties, and that all professors may with them adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour; and an uncommon care to perform relative and social duties, and a noted emphasis in them; a great inoffensiveness of life and conversation in the sight of others; a great meekness, gentleness and benevolence of spirit and behavior; and a great alteration in those things that formerly used to be the person's failings."

Let us not be misunderstood. We do not mean to say that in training our children in the nurture of Christ, the powers of the world to come, the things of the great, awful, eternal future, should not be exerting themselves upon our hearts with commanding and controlling sway. Or, that regarded in itself, or apart from its relations to eternity, this life should not be to us as a vapour, which appeareth for a little moment and then vanisheth away. To educate a child for this life so regarded, were to do it an injury, compared to which its murder would be the tenderest mercy. This is true; but on the other hand it is likewise true, that when the training proceeds with such impressions from the infinite future on the parent's heart, as lead to no measures of specific preparation in the child for meeting this life's responsibilities and temptations, it is as if some great force which spends itself to little purpose for want of a hand to guide it to its mark.

II. But perhaps the principal source of error in the training of children, is in not beginning the business soon enough. Something should be done in the way of preparation and earnest prayer, before we can begin our educational appliances,—before our children are born; but our short-coming commonly appears, not only in omitting or slightly attending to this, but in suffering the first years of existence to pass away without seriously attempting much in training our offspring for Christ. What a deplorable mistake! Were our eyes opened to see it, as it is, there is scarcely an error among men, that would strike us as more to be lamented. It cannot but have consequences of the greatest importance. Even the first days should be improved as part of the seedtime of character and destiny. If man, as newly born, is without distinct exercises of intelligence he is not without susceptibility. Nor is the first action of his senses without influence on that godlike nature, which in such exquisite tenderness lies concealed in his frame of flesh. The shadow of a cloud, it has been said, does not pass over the face of a field without making some change in it: however this may be, certain it is that an infant does not fix its notice for the first time on surrounding objects without taking some impression from them? These objects all have their influence, and if it be undesirable in itself, its result in the child's susceptible nature must be unhappy. It is not necessary to this effect, that intelligence should have begun its operations; our nature can be affected through ether means. Impressions on the senses, even in adults, need not the deductions of reason, or the distinct notices of the understanding, in order to have influence on them of great importance. It may therefore be essential to the highest well-being of a child, that 'holiness to the Lord' should shine in the features of those whom its eyes first look upon, and control the

hands that handle it, and arrange the circumstances of its birth-chamber, and regulate every little function of its infantile nurture.

But how far is our parental care from such early attentions! How long after the developement of intelligence is it, that we commence in earnest with our measures of education? Why this delay? Can we think it of little consequence to the immortal interests of a child, that its nature be not subject to holy influences, when the formation of conscience begins; when the first discriminations are made between right and wrong, good and evil? Yet is it not, as a general fact, incontrovertible, that these discriminations proceed to the third or fourth year without much direct pains, to keep them under Christian direction? There may be a general influence in the family and in parental example, favorable to their just exercise, but the child's intelligence at this very early period, is supposed to be too small to make its direct, not to say its elaborate tuition, according to Christian principles, important, or to any considerable extent practicable.

Was ever any judgment farther from truth than this estimate of infantile intelligence? Let us but consider the amount of knowledge which a child of common capacity requires before the completion of its third year. The mind of that child has already advanced to a vast size, compared to what it was at its beginning. It has already become a great treasury of knowledge. How many persons, places, things, does he know? What a store of ideas has he in his understanding? How many comparisons has he formed among them? How many logical conclusions has he drawn? He has acquired the free and easy and delightful use, perhaps, of more than one language, and can call a great multitude of names, and has an admirable skill in constructing sentences and making discourse. Shall the intelligence which has compassed all this in *less than three years*, be considered too small to demand much industry and pains in securing, if possible, its just exercise and discipline? Yet such it would seem is the view generally taken of it, even by Christian parents!

It is appalling to think seriously of the consequences to a child, of making so little of this period of its life. Human nature, we know, begins the exercise of intelligence under the power of moral depravity; but is it so that this power, for three years, has been presiding over all those multifarious operations of intelligence which have been going on in the soul of the child? Yes, and more than this, that evil power has been all this time growing in strength. The moral corruption of the child, therefore, has been advancing with the progress of its intellectual powers; the latter, thus far, have been the servants of the former: and will they not also, in the three years to come, and with increased probability, in the next three years, if the child should live so long? And is it to be

thought unimportant whether corrective influences be used or not, at the initial stage of being?

But is any success to be hoped for from these influences applied so early? We answer promptly, much, every way. The opinion has forced itself upon the most enlightened and judicious observers of infant life, that it is in this precise period, for the most part, that the seeds of character are planted—the elements formed of the leading power, the moulding and fashioning agency in the moral functions and habits of the soul. Is this opinion ill-founded? We believe that it will endure the severest examination. We cannot doubt, that the day which is to reveal all secrets, will confirm this proposition, that man's infancy, comprehending the first five or six years, forms ordinarily the die of his immortality. Even the exceptions are witnesses to the efficacy of the agents which now exert themselves. If by the divine blessing on educational labors, in future years, the effect of unpropitious influence now generated, is so far set aside, that the work of improvement can proceed, still there is an unfavorable cast of character growing out of that early period, which there is no possibility of correcting entirely.

Still we are afraid, that our earnestness on this point will be unheeded; that the impression will remain, that little can be done by education in these first years. It seems to be thought, very extensively, that the early life of a child must needs advance under the sway of evil: not any culpable remissness, but dire necessity is the cause. What shall we say? Is it not time that this sentiment, whether formally maintained, or lurking amid other unuttered impieties of the heart, were discarded, as an impeachment of the Divine goodness, and an apology for sin? Is it indeed our nature's terrible misfortune, its malignant fate, that it must pass through a period of years, advancing in depravity, exposing it every moment, meanwhile, to inrecoverable ruin? Was it to give an advantage to the author of evil for making sure of man's destruction, that the first years of his existence were made so tender and susceptible? What else must we think, unless we would reproach our Maker, but that precisely the reverse was the purpose of this arrangement—that God presents our offspring to us, not untainted by sin indeed; (for how could that be without a miracle, seeing we are polluted,) but in comparative innocence, and the most yielding and governable of all objects—to the intent that we may have the best possible facilities for applying the influences of recovering mercy? What though the virus of depravity infect the race even in the embryo of being? Has not God appointed provisions and ordinances of grace against that original poison? And if these, the appropriate means of salvation are faithfully applied, does not analogy oblige us to think, that precisely because the time is so early, the success is more probable?

And why should it be thought that there is any insurmountable difficulty in bringing infant life under religious influence? In moral beings, intelligence and conscience are simultaneously developed; and where there is sin, conscience may be made to take cognizance of it, and under just instruction, conscience in a child, can scarcely be opposed; and with a quickened conscience in the presence of moral evil, a sense of the necessity of an atonement springs up; thus in the spirit of a little child, the ground-work may be laid of an experimental knowledge of the gospel.

We give it, therefore, as our full conviction, our absolute and abiding testimony, that there is scarcely a more egregious and pernicious mistake among mankind, than that of disparaging and neglecting the first years of human life.

III. Overlooking, or not duly considering the depravity of human nature in conducting the business of education, leads to inefficiency and failure. Human nature is depraved in our children; it is much more depraved in the world, amongst whom, if death does not prematurely remove them, they must pass their days. To disown or disregard the truth in respect to either fact, is to open a floodgate of practical error.

Christianity in all its peculiar provisions and teachings, assumes that moral depravity even in children, is a poisonous infection of such terrible power, that it bids utter defiance to all lenitives, all management, in every form, from man and creatures; and will yield to no other than the renewing agency of the Spirit of God. The influence of education apart from this agency, may accomplish many things. It may develop in a beautiful symmetry the constitutional excellencies. It may repress constitutional excesses. It may correct constitutional vices. It may cultivate the natural sentiments, refine the tastes, exalt and ennoble the temper and tone of the mind, give dignity and grace to the manners, light and authority to conscience, force and principle to character. It may inspire respect and reverence for the rites and solemnities of religion; form religious habits, and fill the breast with high religious veneration. All this, and more it may do. But there are some things it cannot do: it cannot shed abroad the love of God in the heart, nor displace our natural enmity to God, nor bring the soul under the power of the cross, nor diffuse through it the spirit of Jesus, nor teach it to live by faith, nor introduce into it any one of those fruits of the Holy Spirit, without which all virtue is reprobate, all religion a name or a delusion, and all check upon native depravity ineffectual and temporary.

Now we submit the question, what is, what must be the difference in educational appliances, of justly regarding, or of disregarding this grand cardinal fact concerning the potency of moral evil in our fallen nature? With what difference in parental views and im-

pressions will the business be conducted? Will the parent who keeps it in mind, that amidst the highest of earth's advantages and influences, amidst the purest society and best preceptors he can find among men, his child will remain subject to an inward viti-
 ity, which will soon prove its remediless ruin, if the Spirit of God withhold his renewing power—will such a parent, we ask, in trust-
 ing his child, have no difference of *feeling* from one who disbelieves this fact, or does not give it just consideration? Or will an abiding
 difference of feeling here make no difference in *practice*? We assume that no one denies the necessity of education. We as-
 sume farther, that the parent of whom we speak, looks for the co-
 operation of the Spirit only as sought for and depended on, in the
 use of appropriate means; and our question relates to the differ-
 ence which this parent's convictions on the point before us, must make in the *sort* of educational power which he uses.
 We cannot stay to trace out this difference particularly. It
 will spontaneously occur to every one, how such a parent will ad-
 dress himself to his work, with a holy fear and trembling, and with
 an earnestness and importunity of prayer, which, in the other case,
 must needs be wanting. And it will also occur to every one, how
 an education thus conducted, must differ from one not having this
 grand peculiarity, though in all other respects equal or superior,
 as the influence of heaven differs from that of earth. We will
 mention but one thing wherein the difference will reveal itself di-
 rectly in the consciousness of the child. It is the impression
 which the child receives of what so deeply affects the parent's
 heart. The child cannot but learn through the parent's feel-
 ings, its own need of, and dependence on, the Holy Spirit.—
 It learns this, provided the parent abides in the lively conviction of
 the same fact, more effectually than it could by any other means.
 The momentous lesson is incessantly inculcated, day and night, di-
 rectly and indirectly, by silence as well as by speech, under the
 great advantage which the parental and filial relations afford. Now
 what we wish to be pondered here, is the probable difference in re-
 sult, as to the religious character and destiny of a child, whose
 soul is kept under an educational influence of this sort, and of one
 who wants this specific influence, however favored in all other re-
 spects.

IV. The effect of misbelief or misjudgment as to the moral
 state of the world is scarcely less unfavorable.

As Christianity presupposes the entire depravity of our nature
 even in infancy, so it presupposes and declares that the advance of
 unrenewed man in years, is a progressive subjugation to the power
 of moral evil; and accordingly it represents the state of human
 society—the unrenewed world—in its relations to God and eterni-
 ty, as most deplorably and desperately corrupt. The manner of

its testimony on this subject, shows plainly that it intends to make the strongest possible impression; declaring of the world, that it *lieth in wickedness*, that it is in the interest and service of Satan, the great enemy of God, nay, that it hath taken Satan for its god; and demanding the utter renunciation of worldliness, as the unchangeable condition of the Divine mercy. It has ever been a risk of reputation in the teachers of Christianity to affirm this, but they are not its teachers, who do not declare it with much distinctness and earnestness. While the record stands in the Book of God that whatsoever is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world, so that if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him; and not only so, but that the friendship of the world is enmity with God; while these with a great multitude of parallel scriptures, stand in the sacred volume in such bold relief; the ministry were false to Christ, if its voice on this subject were either silent, or such as to the world's ear would be acceptable or tolerable. Now what if the parental heart, in conducting the education of children, has habitual misgiving, or is without an assured and living faith in respect to the view given by Christianity of the moral state of this world? Is not such an unconvinced parent, in one most important particular, disqualified for his work? Our children are to go into the world, where they must either enter into conflict with the powers of evil, and by the grace of God overcome them, or else fall in and be workers together with them against Christ and his Church. If we bring them up in the nurture of the Lord, we train them for battle and for triumph on the world's rebellious stage. But shall we, or can we so train them, if instead of recognizing the world as lying in wickedness, and hastening to destruction, we look upon it with eyes of complacency or desire, or allowance? It will be the world's spirit in us, that will give the world favor in our view, and having that spirit ourselves, we shall with entire certainty, yea, even of necessity, if Divine grace do not prevent, infuse it into the hearts of our children. We cannot do otherwise. We shall teach them worldliness even in our silence, and the spirit of the world which is in them, will make them apt and swift learners without any other instruction. We may teach them religion too, but we shall give them impressions on religious subjects, which will rather prepare them for relations of friendship with the world, than those of a determined and triumphant disconformity to it. To a certain style or manner of religion, the world makes no objection. Man is constitutionally formed for religion, and of all characters, that which tastefully interblends religion with worldliness, so as to give the latter its chosen place, stands highest, especially among the more respectable and elevated classes.

It is, therefore, palpable, how radical mistake in educating children, must needs proceed from a wrong view of the moral condi-

tion of the world on the part of parents. No child receives a Christian education who is not trained to go into the world, not to pass smoothly and reputably along in the current of worldliness, but with enduring firmness and meekness, to maintain the most uncompromising opposition to it. This it is, and nothing short of this, to live among men the life of a Christian. The purpose and end of Christianity is, a complete moral revolution in human society—to 'make all things new' in the commanding principles and objects of human existence: and they are not exemplifying the spirit of Christ without which no one is entitled to the name of a Christian, or serving the cause for which Christ came into the world, who do not make this the grand purpose and endeavor of their own lives.

If, therefore, we would know whether we are earnestly and with probability of success, bringing up our children in the nurture of Christ, we should look well to ourselves, as to the impressions and feelings with which we habitually regard that mass of active being among which our dear offspring are so soon to intermingle. Has the world no such appearance to us, no such spiritual character and relations, no such prospects in reference to the future state, as to make us think it very important that our children, while in the midst of it, should be altogether distinct and heaven-wide separate from it, as to its spirit, principles, purposes, and ends of life? Nay, let us propose the question to ourselves more narrowly. Let us inquire if we think there is but little to be excepted to, little to be renounced and resisted in the better, yea, even in the very best portion of worldly society? How do we look upon the accomplishments, the acquisitions, the company, the pleasures, the elegant modes and ways of life, of the highest class of all? Have we almost no objection to our children's falling in and taking their course here on account of these great advantages? Alas! if we do not think that all these advantages multiplied a thousand fold, would be infinitely unworthy of being coveted for our children at the sacrifice of their non-conformity to the world, how essentially, how completely are we disqualified for the work of their education? Nowhere is the spirit of the world in greater power and strength, nowhere is it more difficult to be opposed, nowhere is it more ensnaring, more seducing, more triumphant, than in this upper sphere of its dominion. If when we look into it, we are so taken with its charms that we can no longer see much to be dreaded or deprecated from worldly influences here, our children will probably have an eternity of regret, that the business of their early training did not fall into different hands. With such a profound blindness to the true character and state of the world, we can give them no other education than one which assumes that man was made not to glorify God, and shine forever in his kingdom above the brightest of the firmament, but to glitter for a moment to the eye of sense, and then pass away into the blackness of darkness forever.

V. We have now considered, briefly, what we take to be the chief sources of mistake in the education of children. There are certain particular errors, perhaps not easy to be classed, which if the time permitted, we might here expose with much advantage, but of them we must content ourselves with the briefest notice.

1. Children are often led by the example, if not by the instructions of their parents, to think of Christianity as unsocial and misanthropic; an enemy to innocent enjoyment, the cultivation of taste and improvement in our temporal condition; indifferent if not unfriendly to the institutions of society and the progress of science and art. How fatally erroneous and hurtful is this impression concerning the holy religion of Christ. Christianity though anti-worldly, is not morose or anti-social. It is in all respects the best friend of human happiness. It seeks the highest advancement of man in all his legitimate powers, tastes, capabilities and enjoyments. It does not identify worldliness with the work and ordinances of God, but directs us how to use every creature of God for our good, and bids us to rejoice therein with thanksgiving. To give children the contrary persuasion, is to set the nature which God has given them, at variance with the instrument of their salvation.

2. Where Christianity is not thus made to frown with malignant severity on the institutions and customs of social life, it is still too often invested with the garb of despotism, in other respects, by parental influence and example. The parents, though Christians, are not habitually happy and heavenly in the frame of their minds; they do not abide in that spiritual mindedness which is life and peace. They are not sufficiently free of legalism with its attendant bondage of fear and doubt, of severity and sternness; and it is well if they do not either infuse the same unlovely spirit into their children, or prejudice them fatally against the gospel, by leading them to identify evangelical piety with inward gloom and austerity.

3. Very unhappy results often spring from the want of discrimination in suiting discipline to the constitutional peculiarities of children. Christianity is always one and the same, but in applying it to individuals, it may be essential to our success, that our manner vary, to correspond with their varying characters and circumstances; and the rule of becoming all things to all, is as important to parents in educating their children, as it is to ministers of the gospel in winning the souls of men. Some children need indulgence, which to others would be ruinous; and some require the intermixture of indulgence with severity, in a proportion which only the wisdom that cometh from above can adjust.

4. The end of much pains in education is often defeated by cross influences on the part of the parents; as when one of them is not pious, and by example, if not by precept teaches irreligion to the children: or, when one has a different standard and kind of religion, and a different judgment as to measures and principles of discipline, from the other.

5. Parents sometimes injure the souls of their children, by their manner of correcting them; administering punishment more in anger than in faithful love, and using greater severity against accidents or carelessness, than against moral trespasses or obliquities.

6. The power of education may be fatally impaired by not proceeding in the work, as God's representatives and ministers, appointed by him to this very thing; but undertaking it, as exclusively of our own will and to answer our own selfish designs and ends;—the difference here being all the difference between the influence of God's name and authority, and that of sinful man's.

7. Finally, it is a quite common fault of parents, that they do not fall in with the measures of the church, for the spiritual good of children; neither desiring the prayers and labors of the church in their behalf, nor urging upon them with any becoming seriousness, a fulfilment of the sacred obligations arising from their connexion with the church. As if the covenant of infant baptism, both in respect to themselves and their children, were an empty ceremony of no significance or influence whatever, or were of itself efficacious and saving, independently of every other means and agency.

We close the discussion with two short remarks. In the first place, the glance we have now taken, at the causes of error in education, confirms us, in the conviction we expressed in the first part of the discourse;—namely, that it is owing, not to fatal necessity, but to a truly culpable delinquency on the part of parents, that there is so much of irreligion to be found in Christian families. The contrary doctrine, has sometimes assumed to itself great sacredness, as an essential part of orthodoxy; and in deference to it, the promises of scripture to parental faith and diligence, have been understood in a sense which implies that they are rather proverbs than promises. But to say nothing of the violence which it offers to the word of God, and the reproach which it casts upon the Divine goodness, and the justification which it affords to one of the highest forms of human unfaithfulness, we are persuaded by considering the evil in question in but a portion of its manifest and well-known sources, that here is indeed the responsible means of what may be well termed, the grand hindrance to the gospel among

mankind. With this in our view, as illustrated by the foregoing observations, we do not wonder that the children of the church mingle with the world, in such frequency, that the work of God's recovering grace cannot be kept in an onward movement, without bringing in others to take the deserted places of baptized apostates. No, we see nothing to wonder at, but that Christian parents should care so little for the eternal well-being of their offspring, and should have so little thoughtfulness or sense of their own high privileges and far-reaching responsibilities.

In the second place, we are persuaded, that there is soon to be a greatly increased attention to the education of children in Christianity. The immense importance of this business must ere long be seen and acknowledged, as hitherto it hath never been. Already a favorable change has taken place; and this change must go forward, with increasing rapidity, as the set time for the conversion of the world draws on. Looking at the laws of our nature, the analogies of Providence, the experience of former times, and above all, at the explicit testimonies of the Divine word, we are constrained to believe, that the heaven of Christianity, will diffuse itself through the mass of human nature, not so much by the impulsive agency of societies for the reformation of particular evils, or even by local revivals of religion, as by the still and patient work of training up children in the nurture and admonition of the gospel. We would by no means be understood, as disapproving or thinking lightly of these instrumentalities: on revivals especially,—on mighty outpourings of the Holy Spirit, our hope rests, for the triumph of Christianity. But what we hold and what we would now enforce is, that these and all other agencies, will mainly prove favorable, by leading to one great silent reform throughout the families of Christendom, in the one matter of the religious education of children. Our chief wish is to arm this sentiment with such power, that it shall become a practical principle, throughout all the households of the saints on earth. We long to see every legitimate agency for promoting the cause of Christ in the most active and energetic exercise; and most earnestly would we pray that abundant effusions of the Spirit of God, may attend the exemplary use of these means of salvation; but still, what we rely upon more than all things else, for the universal and permanent spread of the gospel, is a baptism of the Holy Ghost upon parents, and the representatives of parents in the church, which shall show them what they ought to do in educating children for Christ, enable them to do it, and keep them engaged in the work with a diligence proportioned to its importance.

SERMON CCCXCIII.

BY REV. EDWIN F. HATFIELD.

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THE LORD DEPARTED.

"And he wist not that the Lord was departed from him." Judges xvi. 30.

THE presence of God is the joy of his people, and the pledge of their prosperity. But, "woe to them," saith the Lord, "when I depart from them!"

This the son of Manoah found to his cost. His was a remarkable experience. Even before his birth he appears to have been the object of divine regard in a peculiar degree. A child of promise, from his youth up he received the blessing of God, and was favored above many. "The child grew, and the Lord blessed him." From an early age he was brought under the influence of the Spirit of God in a remarkable and extraordinary manner. "And the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times, in the camp of Dan."

He soon became the wonder of his age, by reason of the marvellous physical strength with which he appeared to be endowed, and gave rise, perhaps, to the fabled Hercules of heathen mythology. In some way unknown to us, and unknowable by man, the Spirit of the Lord imparted unto him a power that made him a terror to his enemies. On the occasion of his meeting a young lion at the vineyards of Timnath, we are told that "the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid." It was because "the Spirit of the Lord had come upon him," that he was able to slay thirty of the men of Ashkelon, on another occasion. The same account is given of the power which he put forth, when, having been bound with two new cords and delivered into the hands of the Philistines, he burst them as if they had been flax burnt with fire, and slew a thousand of his enemies.

It has been much questioned whether Samson was truly a child of God or not. His life, it must be admitted, was very different

from that of David, and other holy men of honored memory. We can discover in it but little of the Spirit of adoption, and see but little, if anything, to confirm his claims to a place among the saints. It is to be borne in mind, however, that the record is short, and occupied more with the exploits of the man, and the wonders that he wrought in behalf of God's people, than with the life of God in the inner man of his heart. He is numbered by the apostle Paul among the Old Testament saints, "who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises," and the like; all of whom "obtained a good report through faith." If saved, it must have been, so as by fire.

That he was the subject, not merely of an occasional afflatus of the Spirit of God, but of an abiding operation, we may gather from the words of our text. His power was derived from his fellowship with the Holy Spirit. It was because of the abiding, or indwelling of the Spirit, that he was able to put forth such amazing strength. However necessary it was that, as a Nazarite, his hair should be unshorn, it was not in his locks that his might was treasured up. When he had been deprived of the hair of his head, it is said of him, that rising up after the deep sleep of which this advantage had been taken, he observed, "I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself;" not knowing "that the Lord was departed from him." In this departure of the Lord, or of the Spirit of the Lord, was his subsequent deficiency. "The Lord had departed from him," and therefore he became a prey to his enemies, and was brought to an untimely grave.

No truth is more clearly or frequently taught in the word of God, than that the Holy Spirit holds intercourse with human beings on the earth. How this intercourse is held, or in what way the Spirit of God influences, sways, and controls the spirit of man, is not to be explained or known in this present corporeal state. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

But it does not follow that we are to reject a doctrine, because there is something mysterious pertaining to it. The world is full of mystery. Man is a mystery to himself. God is all mystery. We must reject all these, and everything else connected with them, if we refuse to believe in the existence of anything that is at all mysterious or incomprehensible. That God is able to commune with the soul of man, to hold intimate intercourse with the human spirit, and to establish an uninterrupted correspondence with his intelligent creatures, must be admitted. You know it, and I know it. That he does do it is matter not only of revelation but of experience. Who is there among us that has not been made to know it again and again? The unconverted are, in every land where the gospel is preached, brought in unnumbered instances to

feel that there is a reality in these influences of the Spirit. When the truth is applied with peculiar power to the heart and conscience, and they are constrained to tremble in review of their sins and in prospect of a judgment to come, they cannot but own that "it is God which worketh in them."

"Say, sinner! hath a voice within,
 Oft whispered to thy secret soul,
 Urged thee to leave the ways of sin,
 And yield thy heart to God's control?
 Sinner! it was a heavenly voice,
 It was the Spirit's gracious call;
 It bade thee make the better choice,
 And haste to seek in Christ thine all."

But it is the child of God, more especially, that, by being made the subject in a peculiar degree of these influences, knows the reality of these gracious operations. Having been born of the Spirit, he cannot but recognize his heavenly parentage. Taught by the Spirit, and led by the Spirit, he has a delightful perception of his divine teacher and guide, and cometh up from the wilderness, leaning on his beloved. Sealed by the Spirit of promise, and made a temple of the Holy Ghost, he cannot deny a present Deity. Brought to feel, from day to day, the constraining power of this Holy One, he often finds occasion to exclaim,

"Sure the blest Comforter is nigh!"

The fact, therefore, of this spiritual intercourse being admitted,—a fact that lies at the very foundation of the Christian scheme, and of revelation itself,—your attention will be directed to two considerations growing out of this fact, and suggested by the words of the text. Consider, first, the evil of losing the Spirit, and, then, that, however great the evil, we may not at the time be aware of it.

I. The departure of the Holy Spirit is an unspeakable evil.

If God can establish this spiritual intercourse, as we have seen, then he can also dissolve the connection thus formed, whenever he pleases. That this connection is frequently dissolved, wholly or in part,—that the Spirit of God, having communed to some extent with the human spirit, does at times, in particular instances, depart from the soul, is a fact as well attested as that of his intercourse with man. When Samson awoke from that fatal sleep into which he had been lured by his vile paramour, and went out to bestir himself, as at other times, he found, though he knew it not at first, that "the Lord had departed from him." That blessed Spirit, which, dwelling in him, and imparting to him grace in every time of need, had made him a terror to his enemies, and a tower of strength to his friends, had left him—and left him a prey to his foes.

The same truth is also taught in other passages of the word of God, and in numerous instances of similar bereavements. We are told in various language to court and cherish the Spirit of God, and admonished not to provoke him to leave us. "My Spirit shall not always strive with man." "Woe, also, to them when I shall depart from them." "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God." "Quench not the Spirit."

It may seem to those who have no desire for the favor of the Almighty, no regard for the joys of fellowship with God, no wish for the infinite bliss of heaven, no fear for the terrors of the world to come, who live to the flesh, and care not for another world, to be a light thing to lose the presence of the Spirit, and to be forsaken of the Holy One of Israel. But to one who has a soul and knows its worth, who is not willing to be shut out from the paradise of God, and to have his portion in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, there cannot be a greater evil than to be abandoned by the Spirit.

Infinitely great are the blessings that flow to the soul from a connection with the Holy Ghost, such as has been suggested. It is by the presence and operations of this Divine agent that

The soul of the stupid sinner is roused to a proper sense of his undone condition:

The sinner is constrained to confess, by being made conscious of his guilt, that he deserves the wrath and curse of the Almighty:

The convicted soul is made to feel its helplessness, to renounce entirely its own righteousness, and to look for salvation simply and alone to Jesus Christ, the only Redeemer of God's elect:

The soul, that was dead in trespasses and in sins, is made alive, born again, and made a new creature; being translated from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God's dear Son:

The work of sanctification, from the very first stage of regeneration to the last of glorification, is carried on in the heart of the believer:

The child of God is sealed and secured against all the wiles, craft, and malice of men and devils; and brought at last into the full possession of the promised and eternal inheritance.

Such are, in few words, the inconceivably blessed results of this spiritual intercourse. Not one of them all can be effected without it. This work is the prerogative of the Holy Ghost. To ascribe it to any other agent is to deny the faith. To impute to any Christian or any Christian church a denial of such honor to the Holy Ghost, is grievously to sin against God and his people.

If, then, these blessings all flow from the Spirit, how infinitely and indispensably important must it be for the sinner, the saint, the ministry, the church, to obtain and secure the presence and intercourse of the Holy Ghost! What the life is to the body, the Spirit

rit of God is to the soul; and vastly more. When the life of the body is gone, death ensues as a matter of course. When the Spirit leaves the soul, death spiritual ensues; and if the Spirit returns no more, death eternal. The sinner from whom he departs for the last time is given over to utter despair and hopeless ruin. The Christian from whom he departs for a season, becomes an object of pity; and the Christian community, thus forsaken, becomes a prey to worldliness, formality, corruption, and soul-destroying error.

In confirmation of these views, survey the desolations of former days. Visit the seven churches of Asia. Behold the deplorable condition of those numerous churches that were founded by apostles, and built up by holy men that heard them. How lamentable has been for ages the state of the Greek, the Armenian, the Nestorian, the Jacobite, the Maronite, and the Roman churches! Learn a similar lesson from the Lutheran and Reformed churches of Europe, and the Protestant establishment of Great Britain.

Are there not also in our own land many mournful examples of the same dreadful calamity? May we not find, if not whole denominations, yet particular churches in every denomination, from which the glory is departed? Are there not, too, in every church, particular individuals from whom the Lord has departed as he did from Samson? May we not look around us, and within us, to-day, here, in this very house, and find not a few painful illustrations of this unparalleled evil? How is it with you, yourself, my hearer?

And is there—can there be, a greater calamity? “Cast me not away from thy presence,” said the king of Israel; “and take not thy Holy Spirit from me.” Take, O Lord! whatever thou wilt; but, Oh! take not away from thy people thy Holy Spirit!

“‘T is paradise when thou art here,—
If thou depart, ‘t is hell.”

II. They from whom the Lord departs, are not always aware of it.

The presence and agency of the Holy Spirit present no obstruction to the orderly operations of the soul with which this spiritual intercourse is established. The mind operates with as much freedom, at and after this connection and co-operation, as before. “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” There is more freedom than there was before,—freedom from evil and counteracting influences. The presence of the Spirit is not, therefore, at once perceived, nor his operations recognized. The soul may be acting under this sweet and heavenly influence, so freely, as not to be aware, at least for some time, of the presence of the Comforter.

In like manner, the Spirit may withdraw from the soul in so much quietness, and in a manner so entirely free from all violence, as to give not the slightest note of warning; as to afford not the slightest intimation of the calamity that is impending. It is not affirmed that such is always the case. It may be otherwise. But ordinarily, the departure of the heavenly visitant becomes known only as in the case of Samson. The man seems to himself to be the very same, and what he seems to be he is. The current of his thoughts and feelings flows on as before; there is, perhaps, neither less nor more obstruction. He wakes from his slumber, and goes forth, like the son of Manoah, to his ordinary pursuits, and "wists not that the Lord is departed from him."

Is it a *church and congregation* that are thus deserted? They may not be at all aware of it, or if at all, not by any means of the extent of the evil. They look upon themselves with as much complacency as ever. They confide as much in their superior strength as before; nay, they may be vastly more confident, and boastingly say with Loadicea of old, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." They may have abundance of outward prosperity; their assemblies may be large, and respectable, and intelligent, and refined, and wealthy. They may be perfectly confident that theirs is "the true church," that they are in the line of the true succession, that they are "the people." And yet, with all this outward show, the very last spark of spiritual life may be just expiring. They may have the form of godliness, and deny the power thereof. There is a body, but the soul is gone. The Lord is departed. Their house is left unto them desolate. The Spirit has left them, and they know not that they are "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." They "wist not that the Lord is departed from them."

Is it a *ministry* that is thus deserted? It is not the laying on of hands, however orderly or canonically, that makes a minister. "Receive ye the Holy Ghost!" said the Redeemer, and, having with the word imparted the gift, he sent them forth to "teach all nations." It is the Holy Ghost that makes men ministers and makes them successful ministers of the New Testament. Deprived of this "earnest of their inheritance," and this seal of their acceptance, their "orders" are empty, powerless, and worthless. A minister of the gospel may be learned, intelligent, accomplished, highly-gifted with shining graces, eloquent, persuasive, winning, melting, subduing, "a capital sermonizer," a first-rate orator;—he may charm, and delight, and move his hearers from their very seats, by the irresistible fervor of his powerful appeals to the heart and conscience, and his whole congregation, that have hung in crowds upon the words that fell from his lips, may go away fully convinced that theirs is the most powerful and eloquent preacher in the city or in the land;—and yet this very man may be in the case of Sam-

son, his locks shorn, his strength gone, and the Lord departed from him. He may preach on, month by month, and year by year, with the approbation of the multitude, and almost worshiped by the crowd that flock to hear him, while, all the time, Satan, the great and wily Philistine, may be binding him and his hearers with cords of iron, to make them grind in the prison-house of despair.

If my voice could reach the ears of my brethren in the ministry, I would with all affection and tenderness ask:—Is it thus with any of you? Has the power of thy ministry gone, and art thou wondering at the cause? Perhaps, brother! the Lord, thy life, has withdrawn his Spirit from thee, and thou knowest it not. If so, it is no wonder that thy preaching is so barren—that thou thyself, though speaking “with the tongues of men and of angels,” art “become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.” Remember, Lord! the sons of Aaron, and, Oh! take not thy Holy Spirit from them!

Is it a *child of God* that is thus deserte? Little does he think, perhaps, of the calamity that has befallen him. Like the lion of the tribe of Dan, he may say, “I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself,” but he is not as he was before. He seeks his closet, and bows the knee in prayer; but he prays not as he did, nor with the fervor and sweetness and importunity of former days. The power of prayer is gone. It is mere lip-service. He goes to his Bible, he turns to the melting tale of “Christ and him crucified;” he reads,—but he might almost as well have closed the book before he began to read. He neither takes the sense, nor remembers what he has read. It is gone from him. His heart is not in it. His heart is elsewhere. He becomes uneasy, restless, and impatient. He is easily fretted. He is often betrayed into sinful passion. He speaks even to some of his best friends as one out of humor. Every thing goes wrong. Every thing is out of joint. Nothing suits him. Nothing succeeds with him as formerly. He goes from ordinance to ordinance, from church to church, from denomination to denomination, but gains no advantage, finds no relief. Or if any at all,

“It is but a poor relief he gains.”

“To change his place, and keep his pains.”

He finds fault with his minister, his elders or deacons, his fellow-Christians, “the church,”—of all but himself. His soul languishes, his gifts and graces wither, and all the symptoms of a spiritual consumption are upon him. His religion becomes a cold formality, dreary, comfortless and desolate.

All this while, it may be, he knows not what ails him. He wonders that he is not as he once was—that he feels not the same interest in the social meetings of the church, in the spiritual prosperity of his family and friends and fellow-Christians. Is it thus with

thee, my brother? Have I described thy case? Look now at poor Samson, going out as before, but alone, unattended as formerly by the Holy One. Is it not thine own condition? Wretched state! Alas! that any one should continue in it! The Spirit gone, and he wists not that the Lord is departed from him! The Lord help every poor backslider to lay it to heart, and to cry with David, "Restore unto me the joys of thy salvation."

Is it *an unconverted sinner* that is thus deserted? The Spirit, as we have seen, is busy with the unconverted wherever the word of divine grace is proclaimed. In seasons of the special outpouring of the Spirit, very many of the unregenerate are brought into a condition in which it may be said to one and another of them,— "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." As long as the Spirit strives there is hope. If the Spirit departs, the sinner receives "the grace of God in vain." Under the gracious operations of the Holy Ghost, he is brought, perhaps, to feel that "the Lord's time" has come;—that "now is the accepted time," and that "now is the day of salvation." He is told not to grieve the Spirit, not to harden his heart, to submit himself to God, and to present himself a living sacrifice to God NOW. He feels the force of the appeal, has not a word to say against the truth, is conscious that every obstacle has been taken out of his way, and that he has only to fall into the hands of the Lord, in order to be at peace. But he hesitates, puts off the decision and the doing of his present duty, and continues to delay, hour after hour.

The crisis is past. He is the same as before, and yet not the same. He knows that he ought penitently to forsake his sins and return to the Lord, and he says: "At such a time I will do it." The time comes, but he feels a stronger reluctance than ever to do it. A feeling of insensibility, if it may be so called, steals upon him. The preaching moves him not as it did. By imperceptible degrees, one impression after another wears away, one fear after another departs, one care after another succeeds, until the very desire of being a Christian seems to have left him. The change is at no time sudden, but like the stealthy approach of twilight, or the flattering advances of the fatal consumption. It comes upon him unawares, "like a thief in the night."

He, of whom I speak, is all this while a most respectful member of the congregation. He believes as firmly as ever in the claims of the gospel, and is as firmly convinced of his need of its gracious provisions. He seeks the house of God on the Sabbath, renders a marked and exemplary attention to the preaching of the word, observes the strictest propriety in his daily conduct, and carefully refrains from all immorality. But he is not converted; he is, to all human appearance, far less likely to be converted, than he was weeks and months ago. He cannot see that he has done any thing to bring about such a result. He has steadily and carefully

used the means of grace, has put himself in the way of God's blessing, as he thinks, and wonders at his own stupidity. He rouses himself anew to make another effort for securing his soul's salvation, and says,—"I will go out as at other times before, and stir myself up;" but alas! he finds that he is not now as he was before. He is bound in fetters of brass, and his power is gone. And why? He delayed repentance; he refused to obey the voice of the Lord in "the accepted time," he grieved the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit is gone. The poor man is left to himself, and "he wists not that the Lord is departed from him!"

Woeful case, indeed! But, my impenitent hearer! is it not your own? I tremble for you lest yours should be this most unhappy state. I pray God that you may never know what it is to be cast entirely away from his presence. Fellow-sinner! I am in great heaviness on your account. I fear that you have thus grieved the blessed Spirit, and put away from you the day of grace. Do you tell me, that you will seek the Lord again, at least on a dying-bed? Do you fancy that your locks will then be grown again, and that you will then have power to burst the bonds of sin and death? Yes, indeed! if you are one of God's dear children. But if not, you have no such encouragement. There is not a single promise to meet your case. The Lord has departed, and, perhaps, never to return. Then, if he returns not, if he answer not when you call, if he turn a deaf ear to your intreaty,—then, alas!—and I tremble to record it, my heart bleeds at the very thought,—then the Philistine will bind you in fetters of adamant; then he will mock your dying agonies, and make sport with your cries and your groans in the world of woe for ever!

Oh! that I could prevail upon you now to receive the Spirit—to listen to his voice—to welcome him to your heart! That Delilah who has so long beguiled you, and kept you from the Lord, will be your ruin, if you suffer her to put you to sleep, if you listen to her, and not to the Holy Spirit. Break away from the syren.—Loose not, I beseech you, your precious soul. I would persuade you, if I can, (and may God help me to prevail with you,) to give all up for Christ, before I leave you. When next we meet, it may be at the judgment-seat. The Lord prepare us now to pass that solemn test, and bring us to see his face in glory.